

PROGRAM ADVISORY COUNCILS

Importance of Advisory Committees

Because vocational education programs must be an integral part of the community in which they exist, it is necessary to have close cooperation between the school and those in the workforce. One of the most effective ways of providing this link between the community and school is through the vocational education advisory committee.

These committees are unique in their ability to provide occupational information and aid in establishing and maintaining vocational education programs. Their organization, name, and function can be designed to fit specific needs and situations. Their only limitation is that the advisory committee can assume neither legislative nor administrative responsibility. The school can benefit from the experience of the advisory committee and use their recommendations to help build and maintain a successful program.

Advisory committees can assist in (1) general program planning; (2) curriculum and instruction advisement—validation of competencies for vocational business programs; (3) equipment and facilities recommendations; (4) labor market needs and trends; (5) program articulation; (6) student recruitment, career guidance, and placement services; (7) professional development; (8) community public relations; and (9) program evaluation.

One of the purposes of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 is to promote greater cooperation between public agencies and the private sector in preparing individuals for employment. A strong thread of private sector involvement is woven throughout the Act, which spurred the creation of the A+ Schools Program and the Vocational-Technical Education Enhancement Grant Award Program. One of the most effective means of accomplishing private sector involvement is through the utilization of active local advisory groups. In addition, Section 16, Paragraph 1, of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 states that:

...each vocational-technical school, community college, and school district of any public high school receiving a grant authorized by this section shall have an advisory committee composed of local business persons, labor leaders, parents, senior citizens, community leaders, and teachers to establish a plan to ensure that students who graduate from the vocational-technical school, community college, or public high school proceed to a four-year college or high wage job with workplace skill development opportunities.

An excellent source of information and samples of documents to facilitate establishing and utilizing an advisory committee is ***A Facilitator's Guide for Partnerships and Advisory Groups***. The handbook, Catalog Number 30-5492-I, is available from the Instructional Materials Laboratory, 2316 Industrial Drive, Columbia, MO 65202; phone 800-669-2465 or online: <http://www.iml.coe.missouri.edu>.

Benefits of Utilizing an Advisory Committee

An advisory committee for business programs can provide benefits to students, school, and the business community. Some benefits include:

- Career and occupational information--providing current occupational information and trends
- Performance measures--focus on the competencies (knowledge and skills) necessary for students to succeed in the workplace and skills needed to compete in the global marketplace (what students should know and be able to do)
- Placement of graduates or students enrolled in Supervised Business Experience--identify job opportunities including internships, worksite observations and visits as well as placements
- Mock interviews--conduct the interview and provide critique and encouragement so the student learns what to improve and how to make the necessary change
- Equipment and technology recommendations--promote constructive and necessary change within programs
- Resources for classroom instruction--members can lead instruction in areas such as team building, leadership and interpersonal skills
- Link to community--members serve as a link with the employment community but they also learn about your program and tell others

Operational Guidelines

Establishing an advisory committee begins with the business instructor(s) and school administrator discussing the roles, functions, and purposes of an advisory group. They should also discuss the organizational structure and procedure for establishing such a group. As part of the preliminary planning, a written statement of policy regarding the operating guidelines of the partnership should be written to ensure continuity in how the partnership is created and maintained. Formal policies also provide an important foundation if the process is challenged.

Operational guidelines consist of the goals, objectives, rules and procedures of the partnership. The guidelines are developed initially by the local education agency during the planning and organizing for forming the partnership. During the first or second meeting of the advisory committee, the operational guidelines should be finalized and adopted. The operating guidelines should include the following:

- Name and purpose of the partnership
- Number of members
- Manner of selecting members
- Term limitation for membership
- Provision for eliminating inactive members
- School personnel representation at meetings

- Special working groups
- Officers and their duties
- Requirements of meeting minutes
- Number and frequency of meetings
- Length and time of meetings
- Place of meetings
- Preparation of the agenda for meetings
- Method of calling special meetings

Selection of Members

In order for the advisory committee to serve as a means of effective communication between business programs and the citizens to be served, the membership must be representative of the total school service area. Keep in mind that specific funding sources (Perkins, for example) have requirements as to the make-up of the advisory committee. Be sure to be in compliance with the legislation as members are selected to serve on the advisory committee.

Members may be selected to represent:

- All types of business and industry, particularly those predominant in the area
- Labor and management
- Geographical sections of the school service area
- Parents of vocational education students
- Current and former vocational students
- Vocational and technical education administrators, educators and researchers
- Guidance and counseling professionals
- Teachers--including elementary and middle school teachers, academic teachers and tech prep instructors
- Various age and education levels
- Special populations--individuals with disabilities, from economically disadvantaged families, preparing for nontraditional careers, displaced homemakers, etc.

This representation will enable the advisory committee to reflect the points of view of the various segments of the community being served by vocational and business education. In addition, a vocational instructor and representative of the administration should serve as non-voting consulting members. Although the administrative representative need not be present at all meetings, all business instructors should be in attendance at all meetings to provide information and participate in discussion.

Operation of the Advisory Committee

Effective advisory committees should be large enough to reflect diversity of the employment community yet small enough to be managed effectively. The number of members to serve on the advisory committee will be affected by the size of the community, the scope of the business education offerings, the diversity of businesses and industries in the community, and the purpose of the council.

Staggered terms of service for advisory committee members ensure both continuity and ability to accommodate change. A rotational, three-year term of service most easily allows for continuity and change. Relatively few effective committees reappoint members to successive terms, but require at least a one-year absence before reappointment. Establishing the length of term as policy will also clarify the time demands for members.

Advisory Committee Meetings

Organized meetings are the key to a successful advisory committee. Considerations should be given to the frequency of meetings, a regularly scheduled meeting date, and a well-planned agenda for each meeting. Members should be notified of the meeting date well in advance with a written reminder and a proposed agenda.

Agenda items could include:

- Roll call
- Approval of previous minutes
- Introduction of guests
- Unfinished business summarization
- New business and reports of special interest
- Miscellaneous discussion
- Adjournment

As the official record of the advisory committee's activities, minutes should be provided to all members. Minutes generally include a listing of those who attended the meeting, a summary of each issue that was discussed, and any decisions or recommendations that were made.

A well-organized advisory committee will develop goals to address issues or concerns identified by the members. Once the goals are identified, the discussion can be more specific in terms of exactly what it is the group will accomplish. The activities on the plan of work can then be incorporated into the agendas for each meeting.

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

**Business Education Advisory Meeting
November 17, 200_
7:00-8:00 p.m.
Business Classroom 402**

- Call to Order
- Introduction of Members
- Purpose of Meeting/Role of Members
- Overview of Business Education Program
 - Courses Offered
 - Curriculum Content
 - Equipment/Facilities
 - FBLA
 - SBE
- Discuss Employment Needs in the Community Region
- Discuss Skills of Employees in Various Business Occupations
- Discuss Agenda Topics for Next Meeting (Promotion of Business Education, Recruitment of Students, Identify Possible Field Trips, Develop a Speaker Resource List, etc.)
- Adjourn

Effective Use of An Advisory Committee

Presentation of suggestions or reports brought to the advisory committee should:

- Be brief, clear and concise
- Tell the school/program instructor(s) the specific action the committee recommends
- Include a rationale for the recommendation
- Be viewed as advisory in nature

Input provided by members of the advisory committee should be considered important and valued. School officials should review and consider suggestions and respond accordingly. The official response to suggestions should be written and sent to the advisory committee as soon as possible. Responses may include:

- Adoption of the suggestion(s) as recommended
- Adoption with modification (reasons for the changes should be given)
- Rejection of the suggestion(s) with reasons given for the rejection

Periodically, the advisory committee should review its activities. The review can be formal or informal. The goal of the review is to help the committee determine its overall effectiveness. The review can help the committee determine the:

- Extent to which the group is accomplishing its goals
- Extent to which the recommendations and actions have strengthened the business education program
- Future direction and activities for the committee

Recognize Advisory Committee Members

Since members of the advisory committee are not paid, it is essential to recognize members for their efforts. The best types of rewards or recognition are those that can increase productivity, improve the group's interaction, and increase member satisfaction. One of the best rewards is to ask for advice and respond to it. It is also important to make the public aware of the activities of the advisory committee and their efforts to improve the vocational business program.

SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

Date

Ms. Liz Edwards
213 West Lyons
Springfield, MO 65803

Dear Ms. Edwards:

Your experience and demonstrated competence has led to your recommendation for membership on the Vocational Instructional Program Advisory Council. The Council is composed of outstanding business, industry, and civic representatives from our community. It works to forge closer cooperation between business and education by continually improving the vocational preparation of students. Your insight into training needs and competencies would be of great value.

We invite you to become a member of the Council; your three-year term will begin on July 15. Please consider this invitation and inform us of your decision by May 15. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Instructor Name